

**NATIONAL
SERVICE**

*solution ...
or
servitude*

why national service

The proponents of National Service claim that their program will "give youth an opportunity to serve and work toward solving the problems and fulfilling the needs of our society, and in so doing to fulfill their own need 'to be needed,' and to know that they are contributing to the betterment of the world." Yet an examination of some of the specific ways in which National Service would implement these ideas raises some serious questions.



The Proponents Say:

"At age 18 all men and women will have the opportunity to apply for National Service through the National Service System. For men, this application will be coupled with registration for selective service."

But:

National Service would not merely "give youth an opportunity to serve," it would conscript all young men into government service, either in a military or civilian capacity. It requires little imagination to see that once the program is under way, it would be only a small step to also extend conscription to include young women as well.

Is the "betterment of the world" to be achieved by the involuntary servitude to the state of all American youth? This is a serious question we should all ask ourselves. The 13th amendment expressly forbids involuntary servitude -- yet our government already freely practices it in one of its most pernicious forms.

Even if universal conscription is the answer to the ills of the world, the plan proposed is subordinate to the military. The proponents clearly state: "Military needs will be satisfied first by volunteers for military service, ... then, as necessary, by conscription from volunteers for civilian service." Clearly, a national program which gives first priority to military needs is not one aimed at the betterment of the world, but to the furthering of narrow goals of national interest.

The Proponents Say:

"Conceivably, four million young people could be involved in National Service by 1972, at a cost of some twenty billion dollars -- one fourth of the defense budget for 1968. The cost of National Service will be shared by public and private interests, but the primary cost must ultimately be underwritten by the federal government."

But:

Clearly, the cost of such a vast program would necessarily be borne by the Federal government with only limited private participation. Government money ultimately means government control. What is not clear in the proponents statements is how they will guarantee that the National Service will be used to implement the stated goals.

We have already seen how the idealistic goals of the Peace Corps have been made to serve American interests abroad. We have seen how the volunteers in VISTA and the Peace Corps have been muzzled or dismissed from service when they criticize National policy. By placing the goals of world betterment and the bodies and minds of four million more American youths in the hands of the National government, the question of government priorities becomes urgent.

Great numbers of American youth have rejected our present National policy and its goals. Shall we woo them back by broadening the base of universal conscription?

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The Proponents Say:

"The focus of the work will be toward all individuals and will be politically non-partisan. We will generate among adults, college students and young people a ground swell of support for National Service of such magnitude and fervor that political forces will naturally support the needs of the program."

But:

Probably more clearly than any other statement, this one underscores the dangers of the thinking behind National Service -- i.e. to create a sacred cow which will be outside of the realm of democratic discussion and debate. How a government program can be non-political seems incomprehensible.

Indeed, if other government programs are any key, it seems clear that such a program as National Service must include indoctrination similar to that carried out by the military services. Conscription, regimentation and indoctrination -- all necessary components of such a mass National program -- are the antithesis of civilian goals; ideas which make a mockery of our Bill of Rights. Think of how this program could easily contribute to the seemingly inevitable drift of our nation toward the horrors of totalitarianism.

In fact, the value of indoctrination has been underscored by one of the supporters of the idea. General Lewis Hershey, head of the Selective Service, favors such a plan "not so much for its contribution to national defense as for its character building value in a society where, in his view, the family, school and church have lost their effectiveness in molding today's youth. He says of a mandatory program: 'What I'm proposing isn't like Hitler. If this country decided to do it and not some dictator.... The question is, what are you running? A force to garrison the world or a training school for citizens?'" It should however be clear that the program poses the danger of a reversal of what democracy should be. Instead of free citizens making the government, the government will "mold" its citizens and in a context which the proponents hope will be free from political debate. Just as 27 uninterrupted years of military conscription have indoctrinated an entire generation of American men with military goals and ideals, National Service would inevitably include the political indoctrination of our youth by Government. Is this democracy in action or its antithesis?

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